

SUPPORTING SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Our region's law enforcement officers are our first line of defense in coping with emergencies in our communities. These individuals are generous members of our society who risk personal safety for the public good. It is important to protect the safety of these individuals by providing the best equipment and training possible.

For these reasons, supporting efforts to help ensure the safety of law enforcement personnel and provide them with the facilities and equipment necessary to protect our region's residents are two of my highest priorities. I am pleased to report that this week we have taken two significant steps to advance these goals.

On Wednesday, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a measure I coauthored and managed on the House floor that will enable retired and current law enforcement officers to carry a concealed firearm throughout the United States.

Allowing trained active and retired law enforcement officers to carry firearms enhances public safety by ensuring that officers have the means to defend themselves and other innocent victims from acts of violence. It also appropriately honors the men and women who protect our neighborhoods and our communities.

Since enactment of the Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act in 2004, qualified retired officers have faced varying and inconsistent certification procedures from state to state, complicating their ability to carry a firearm. The bill approved by the House modernizes the existing law to streamline the certification process and give retired officers more flexibility in obtaining certification to carry a firearm, while still requiring the retirees to maintain the appropriate firearms training.

On Thursday, we took another step to support our region's law enforcement officers when, at my urging, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency, provided federal funding totaling \$2,083,212 to the New River Criminal Justice Training Academy for the construction of a new training facility in Dublin.

Currently, the Training Academy provides training in an aging former school facility in Draper and a former water plant building in Dublin, both of which are in need of major repairs and are inadequate to provide safe, modern training for our region's law enforcement officers. With the benefit of the federal funds, a new and modern facility 11,000 square feet in size will be constructed in Dublin to provide the most up-to-date training to our region's law enforcement personnel.

The federal funds will ensure that law enforcement officers in Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Pulaski and Montgomery Counties, the City of Galax, and the Towns and institutions in those areas have access to the most up-to-date training possible and can provide the highest quality protection to our region's residents.

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